

Try once more to avoid state strike

By PETER HARRIGAN

State labor negotiators and representatives of the Civil Service Employees Association will meet in Albany today in an effort to head off a strike by about 145,000 state workers now set for 6 a.m. Monday.

The chances that the strike will be averted appeared to be slim yesterday as the state and the CSEA, in legal briefs filed with a special legislative impasse committee, adhered to the positions they have taken all along in the current dispute over pay raises.

The two sides agreed to the talks yesterday after the Public Employment Relations Board suggested "intensive negotiations" begin Friday afternoon. CSEA leaders agreed to participate only if the state was ready to make "an acceptable offer" and if the talks were moved up to today.

PERB will not participate in the talks. CSEA leaders had been especially adamant that if talks were to resume, they would have to be "face to face," with no third party intervening.

In the event of a strike, the major Staten Island facilities affected would be:

☐ The Willowbrook Developmental Center.

☐ The South Beach Psychiatric Center.

☐ The Arthur Kill Correctional Facility.

☐ The Department of Motor Vehicles' district office in Tompkinsville and Administrative Adjudication Bureau office in St. George.

☐ The state Labor Department's unemployment claims office in West Brighton and employment center in St. George.

☐ The Institute for Basic Research in Willowbrook.

Agency officials have said that if workers walk off their jobs, supervisory personnel who are not members of the CSEA would be called in and attempt to open offices and provide essential services at institutions such as Willowbrook, the South Beach Psychiatric Center and the Arthur Kill prison.

In addition, some Willowbrook and South Beach residents would be temporarily discharged, and volunteers would be sought to help administrative employees with such tasks as food preparation and patient care.

The state-run Island facilities currently employ about 4,000 CSEA members in administrative, professional, operational and institutional capacities.

The CSEA, in a brief submitted yesterday to State Sen. John J. Marchi and the 11 other members of the Legislature's impasse committee, demanded immediate raises amounting to the higher of \$1,200 or 12 per cent of current wages for all union members.

One CSEA official estimated the package would cost the state about \$120 million during the current fiscal year.

The state, in its brief, repeated its two earlier offers of 5 per cent raises this year and next year, or a two-step 8.5 per cent raise during the current fiscal year.

Under the latter plan, which reportedly would cost about \$70 million, lower-paid state workers would receive immediate raises of 5 per cent and an additional 3.5 per cent salary hike Jan. 1. Other CSEA members would receive 3.5 per cent now and 5 per cent in January.

The Legislature, in approving the state's 1977-78 budget two weeks ago, set aside about \$60 million to cover the

cost of a wage hike for state workers. Any extra money eventually needed would be authorized in the state's supplemental budget later this year.

Aside from the wage increase, a number of non-money issues such as increased travel allowances were also covered in the briefs filed yesterday. The legislative impasse panel is to hold a public hearing on all of the demands Monday in Albany and will make a recommendation for consideration by the full Legislature later in the week.

The possibility that the committee would hold its hearing and make a recommendation this week in an attempt to avert the strike has apparently been shelved in view of the PERB call for a final negotiating session tomorrow.

If tomorrow's talks fail to produce an agreement and workers strike Monday, it will be up to the Legislature to work out a wage settlement.

The CSEA is arguing that a 12 per cent pay raise is more than justified since the cost of living has gone up by more than 20 per cent since rank-and-file state workers last received substantial wage hikes.